



UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
United States Patent and Trademark Office
Address: COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450
www.uspto.gov

APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.		
10/532,221	04/22/2005	Takahiro Fujii	040894-7222	8359		
9629	7590	12/19/2007	EXAMINER			
MORGAN LEWIS & BOCKIUS LLP 1111 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW WASHINGTON, DC 20004				BALL, JOHN C		
ART UNIT		PAPER NUMBER				
4128						
MAIL DATE		DELIVERY MODE				
12/19/2007		PAPER				

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

The time period for reply, if any, is set in the attached communication.

Office Action Summary	Application No.	Applicant(s)	
	10/532,221	FUJII ET AL.	
	Examiner	Art Unit	
	J. CHRISTOPHER BALL	4128	

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) Responsive to communication(s) filed on 04/22/2005.
 2a) This action is FINAL. 2b) This action is non-final.
 3) Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) Claim(s) 1-22 is/are pending in the application.
 4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
 5) Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
 6) Claim(s) 1-22 is/are rejected.
 7) Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
 8) Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
 10) The drawing(s) filed on 23 February 2006 is/are: a) accepted or b) objected to by the Examiner.
 Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
 Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
 11) The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
 a) All b) Some * c) None of:
 1. Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 2. Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 3. Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Notice of References Cited (PTO-892) | 4) <input type="checkbox"/> Interview Summary (PTO-413) |
| 2) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948) | Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____ . |
| 3) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO/SB/08)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date <u>04/22/2005</u> . | 5) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Informal Patent Application |
| | 6) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ . |

DETAILED ACTION

Summary

1. This is the initial Office Action based on the FUJII et al. application filed as National Stage Entry with the Office on 10/22/2003.
2. Claims 1-22 are currently pending and have been fully considered.

Specification

3. The title of the invention is not descriptive. A new title is required that is clearly indicative of the invention to which the claims are directed.

The following title is suggested: THERMOELECTRIC CONVERTER WITH HIGH-TEMPERATURE SIDE PERMEABLE ELECTRODE.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

4. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.
5. The factual inquiries set forth in *Graham v. John Deere Co.*, 383 U.S. 1, 148 USPQ 459 (1966), that are applied for establishing a background for determining obviousness under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) are summarized as follows:

Art Unit: 4128

1. Determining the scope and contents of the prior art.
 2. Ascertaining the differences between the prior art and the claims at issue.
 3. Resolving the level of ordinary skill in the pertinent art.
 4. Considering objective evidence present in the application indicating obviousness or nonobviousness.
6. Claims 1-3, 10, 11, 13 – 18 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over COLE (SCIENCE, vol. 221, no. 4614, Sept. 2, 1983, p. 915-920) in view of TANAKA (PROCEEDINGS OF THE 35TH INTERSOCIETY ENERGY CONVERSION ENGINEERING CONFERENCE, vol. 2, July 24-28, 2000, pp. 925-930).

COLE discloses thermoelectric energy conversion with solid electrolytes, wherein is shown an operation medium, in the form of liquid/vapor sodium in contact with an electrolyte medium having ion conductivity, in the form of beta"-alumina solid electrolyte (BASE), wherein the operating medium is in contact with a terminal, in the form of an electrical lead, that inherently allows for collection or emission of electrons via redox processes (first paragraph of "Principles of Operation" on page 916 and Figure 2), which are limitations recited in Claims 1 and 13 of the instant application.

COLE also discloses a porous electrode in contact with the other end of the liquid/vapor sodium operating medium, where the electrode is connected to a second electrical lead and it allows the sodium to permeate through it (sixth and seventh sentences of "Principles of Operation" on page 916 and Figure 3), which are limitations recited in Claims 1 and 13 of the instant application.

It is also shown in COLE that the operating temperature in the upper regions is in the range 900 to 1300 K, resulting in a sodium vapor pressure between 0.05 and 2.5 atm at the interface of the solid electrolyte and the sodium operating medium. Also, COLE describes the temperature in the lower region is in the range from 400 to 800K, which results in a sodium vapor pressure in the range from 10^{-9} to 0.01 atm at the interface of the electrolyte and the permeable electrode (third through fifth sentence, first paragraph of "Principles of Operation" on page 916). It would be obvious to one with ordinary skill in the art to experiment with the two temperature ranges, without extensive experimentation, and arrive at the lowest end of the temperature range for the upper region and the highest end of the temperature range for the lower region, resulting in pressures at the two previously mentioned interfaces that are substantially the same (i.e., 0.05 atm versus 0.01 atm), which is a limitation recited in Claim 1 of the instant application.

COLE discloses that the electrolyte used is beta"-alumina, a solid electrolyte (first through third sentences, second paragraph of "Background" on page 915), which are limitations recited in Claims 2, 3, and 16 of the instant application.

COLE discloses use of molten sodium, which is an alkali metal (first through third sentences, second paragraph of "Principles of Operation" on page 916), which are limitations recited in Claims 10, 11, 17, and 18 in the instant application.

COLE discloses that sodium atoms, the operating medium, absorb their heat of vaporization, leave the porous electrode (i.e., being vaporized at the porous electrode - BASE interface), move through the vapor space, and release their

heat of condensation on the condenser surface and are condensed (second sentence of last paragraph of "Principles of Operation" on page 916, and Figure 3), which are limitations recited in Claim 13 of the instant application.

COLE discloses the middle portion of beta"-alumina solid electrolyte (BASE) acts as a partition plate for separating the contact interface between the electrolyte medium and the operating medium and the contact interface between the electrolyte and the permeable electrode (Figure 3), which is a limitation recited in Claim 14 of the instant application.

COLE discloses the contact portion of the operating medium, liquid sodium, and the electrolyte medium, BASE, has a higher temperature (~1200 K) than the condensing portion (~500) (Figure 3), which is a limitation in Claim 15 of the instant application.

COLE does not disclose the contact portion of the of the electrolyte medium with the operating medium disposed at the low-temperature side while the contact portion of the electrolyte medium with the permeable electrode disposed at the high-temperature side, which are limitations recited in Claims 1 and 13 of the instant application. COLE does not disclose where the pressure difference between the contact portion of the operating medium with the first terminal and the condensing portion is equal to or less than the vapor pressure difference of the operating medium which is caused by a temperature difference between the two aforementioned elements, which is a limitation recited in Claim 13 of the instant application.

TANAKA discloses a design for a small-sized AMTEC cell, wherein a molybdenum mesh electrode is in contact with a BASE tube (a solid electrolyte) between two tube heaters (fifth paragraph of "Test Cell Component" portion of "EXPERIMENTAL" section, page 926 and Figure 3), making this interface disposed at the high-temperature side, and where sodium is raised from a liquid pool via a capillary wick to be in contact the BASE tube from the bottom of device to the high temperature region (first sentence of first paragraph of "Capillary Assembly" portion of "EXPERIMENTAL" section, page 926 and Figure 3), making this interface disposed in the low-temperature side, which are limitations recited in Claims 1 and 13 of the instant application.

TANAKA also discloses the effect of the pressure drops of the tested cell design seem to be negligible (last two sentence of second paragraph of "RESULTS AND DISCUSSION" on page 928), therefore the vapor pressures would be dependant upon the temperature of various portions of the cell. This would lead to a pressure difference between the contact portion of the operating medium with the first terminal and the condensing portion equal to the vapor pressure difference between these two elements due temperature difference, which is a limitation recited in Claim 13 of the instant application.

COLE and TANAKA are analogous art, in that they both deal with the same technical area, alkali metal thermoelectric converters.

At the time of the present invention, it would have been obvious to one with ordinary skill in the art to modify the disclosed thermoelectric energy conversion

device of COLE with elements taught by TANAKA since TANAKA's modifications are aimed toward allowing operation at a lower temperature, which gives longer electrode lifetimes (TANAKA, third and fourth sentences, sixth paragraph of "INTRODUCTION" section on page 925).

7. Claims 4 and 20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over COLE (SCIENCE, vol. 221, no. 4614, Sept. 2, 1983, p. 915-920) and TANAKA (PROCEEDINGS OF THE 35TH INTERSOCIETY ENERGY CONVERSION ENGINEERING CONFERENCE, vol. 2, July 24-28, 2000, pp. 925-930) as applied to claims 1-3, 10, 11, 13 -18 above, and further in view of COOPER et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,039,351).

COLE and TANAKA teach the limitations of Claims 1 and 13 of the instant application as stated above.

Neither COLE nor TANAKA discloses a thermoelectric converter wherein the electrolyte medium is comprised of electrolyte materials having different ion conductivity.

COOPER et al. disclose a high performance thin film alkali metal thermoelectric device comprised of a porous structure, which functions as the solid electrolyte, which is a composite of niobium, utilized as a support element which the sodium must diffusion through and placed between the sodium and critical electrolyte, and beta-alumina (Col. 2, lines 33-41, two materials with inherently different ion

conductivity, which is a limitation recited in Claims 4 and 20 in the instant application.

COLE, TANAKA, and COOPER et al. are analogous art, in that they deal with the same technical area, alkali metal thermoelectric converters.

At the time of the present invention, it would have been obvious to one with ordinary skill in the art to modify the disclosed thermoelectric energy conversion device of COLE and TANAKA with the electrolyte composite taught by COOPER et al. since the modification increases the electrolyte's ability to withstand mechanical and thermally induced loads, thereby increasing the electrolyte's reliability and making it more economical to produce and maintain (COOPER et al., Col. 1, lines 52-57).

8. Claims 5-9, 21, and 22 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over COLE (SCIENCE, vol. 221, no. 4614, Sept. 2, 1983, p. 915-920) and TANAKA (PROCEEDINGS OF THE 35TH INTERSOCIETY ENERGY CONVERSION ENGINEERING CONFERENCE, vol. 2, July 24-28, 2000, pp. 925-930) as applied to claims 1-3, 10, 11, 13-18 above, and further in view of WRIGHT (U.S. Patent No. 5,143,802).

COLE and TANAKA teach the limitations of Claims 1 and 13 of the instant application as stated above. Additionally, COLE discloses that the electrolyte used is beta"-alumina, a solid electrolyte (first through third sentences, second paragraph of "Background" on page 915).

Neither COLE nor TANAKA discloses a thermoelectric converter wherein the electrolyte medium is comprised of a solid electrolyte that is hollow or tubular-shaped having a bottom and a liquid electrolyte material is introduced in the hollow member, nor do they disclose the electrolyte medium is comprised of a liquid electrolyte, or that the liquid electrolyte material is a molten salt.

WRIGHT discloses a high-temperature rechargeable electrochemical cell, wherein the cell is comprised of a β'' -alumina tube with a closed lower end and an open upper end (Col. 6, lines 25-27), which are limitations recited in Claims 5, 6, 21, and 22 of the instant application. WRIGHT additionally discloses a space within the β'' -alumina tube is flooded with sodium aluminum chloride liquid molten salt electrolyte (Col. 7, lines 5-8), which are limitations recited in Claims 5, 7-9, and 21 of the instant application.

COLE, TANAKA, and WRIGHT are analogous art, in that they deal with the same technical area, alkali metal energy sources.

At the time of the present invention, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art to modify the disclosed thermoelectric energy conversion device of COLE and TANAKA with the elements taught by WRIGHT since the modifications impart an ionic pathway which is less tortuous than pathways through a solid electrolyte, facilitating ion diffusion and promoting high power (WRIGHT, Col. 5, lines 55-63).

9. Claims 12 and 19 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over COLE (SCIENCE, vol. 221, no. 4614, Sept. 2, 1983, p. 915-920) and TANAKA (PROCEEDINGS OF THE 35TH INTERSOCIETY ENERGY CONVERSION ENGINEERING CONFERENCE, vol. 2, July 24-28, 2000, pp. 925-930) as applied to claims 1-3, 10, 11, 14-18 above, and further in view of TILLEY et al. (U.S. Patent No. 4,910,105).

COLE and TANAKA teach the limitations of Claims 1 and 13 of the instant application as stated above.

Neither COLE nor TANAKA discloses a thermoelectric converter wherein the operating medium is impregnated in an impregnation member.

TILLEY et al. disclose high-temperature rechargeable electrochemical cell, wherein the cell is comprised by a powder layer, which functions as an impregnation member, that is saturated with molten sodium, by capillary action sufficient to draw molten sodium, an operating medium, up through the powder layer, which it impregnates, to an solid electrolyte BASE tube against gravity (Col. 4, lines 56-60), which is a limitation recited in Claims 12 and 19 of the instant application.

COLE, TANAKA, and TILLEY et al. are analogous art, in that they deal with the same technical area, alkali metal energy sources.

At the time of the present invention, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art to modify the disclosed thermoelectric energy conversion device of COLE and TANAKA with the modification of utilizing the impregnating

powder particles taught by TILLEY et al. since the particles automatically engages the outside of the beta-alumina tube at a plurality of regularly and closely spaced positions, allowing capillarity to cause sodium to engage the beta-alumina tube over substantially its full surface (TILLEY et al., Col. 6, lines 35-39).

Conclusion

10. Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to J. CHRISTOPHER BALL whose telephone number is (571)270-5119. The examiner can normally be reached on Monday through Thursday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm (EDT).

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Barbara Gilliam can be reached on (571) 272-1330. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service

Application/Control Number: 10/532,221
Art Unit: 4128

Page 12

Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

/Barbara L. Gilliam/
Supervisory Patent Examiner, Art
Unit 4128

JCB
12/11/2007